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C O N F I D E N T I A L VILNIUS 001240

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB AND EURUMB

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BO](#) [RS](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: GOL SEEKS TO PLAY THE RUSSIAN CARD WITH LUKASHENKO

REF: A. SECSTATE 188900

[B](#). VILNIUS 1161

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Alexander Titolo for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The GOL believes that a joint USG-EU mission to Belarus to deliver a strong message to the regime is doomed to fail if the Government of Russia does not also participate. The MFA argues that any trip to Minsk by a high-level USG official should include a stop in Moscow aimed at enlisting Russian support in pressuring Lukashenko. GOL officials acknowledge that Moscow could take advantage of such an overture to draw Belarus closer. They argue, however, that we should redouble our efforts to swing Russia to the USG/EU position because this is the only measure likely to sway Lukashenko. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) MFA European Union Division Director Zygimantas Pavilionis, who doubles as Political Director, requested a meeting with the Ambassador November 22 to detail GOL concerns about the one-time outreach to the Minsk regime that the USG has proposed (ref A). Pavilionis said that while the GOL agrees in principle with the idea of sending a high-level messenger or messengers to deliver a strong message to Lukashenko, he doubts that such a mission will achieve its desired result. He stated that the "missing link" in the USG/EU Belarus strategy is Russia. Pavilionis said that without Russia's involvement, Lukashenko would feel free to ignore any USG/EU entreaties to sit out next year's presidential elections and/or to allow OSCE election observers.

[1](#)3. (C) Pavilionis said that any mission by a high-ranking USG official to deliver a message to Lukashenko should include a stop in Moscow before any meeting with the regime in Minsk. Such a trip, Pavilionis suggested, could successfully open a meaningful dialogue with Russia on Belarus. He opined that the mere perception that Russia would not support the regime if it initiated further anti-democratic measures would do more to shake Lukashenko's confidence than any other measure.

[1](#)4. (C) Ambassador Mull questioned whether the Government of Russia would not reject any overture out of hand, and use the opportunity to draw Belarus even closer -- precisely the outcome the GOL would like to avoid. Pavilionis conceded that this was a risk, but said that Russia is moving in that direction anyway, including a systematic push for full union with Belarus. He said that the USG and EU should also attempt to enlist Moscow to help pressure Lukashenko into allowing OSCE observers to enter Belarus far enough in advance of elections to adequately perform their mission. If persuasion does not work, he continued, the USG, as "the only superpower," should threaten (unspecified) actions to compel Russia to cooperate.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Pavilionis offered to host a working dinner for EUR/DAS David Kramer on Sunday, December 4 while he is in Vilnius for the USG/GOL-organized donors coordination meeting on Belarus. If travel schedules do not permit a dinner, Pavilionis suggested a meeting on the margins of the conference.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: Pavilionis and others are eager to draw USG and EU attention to Russia's role in Belarus, reflecting growing -- and understandable -- Lithuanian anxiety about the possibility of a Russia-Belarus union (ref b). However, his alarming remark about the utility of U.S. threats to Moscow suggests the need for a reality check about the policy tools that we are prepared to employ. We believe a meeting next month between DAS Kramer and Lithuanian policymakers would be a great way to realign the GOL with our approach.

KELLY